

Option Analysis for Slinfold's Neighbourhood Plan 2

Informative note for SPC prepared by SNPWG.

Introduction

Slinfold's Neighbourhood Plan 2 (SNP2) could represent another pivotal opportunity for the community to shape its future development, housing, and infrastructure (e.g. Scout Hut) projects in alignment with local needs and values. The current Plan is out of date and Horsham's failure to produce its own Local Plan has meant the district is extremely vulnerable to speculative development with a presumption in favour of the developer and Horsham stating they are unlikely to finance planning appeals.

Without a Local Plan in place, even a new Neighbourhood Plan will be significantly less effective. Neighbourhood plans without a local plan can still influence development—but their effectiveness is significantly constrained. This is principally because:

Legal Status vs Strategic Vacuum

- A neighbourhood plan becomes part of the **statutory development plan** once adopted, so it carries legal weight in decision-making.
- However, it must be **in general conformity with strategic policies**—which are usually set out in the local plan. Without one, there's a **strategic policy vacuum**, making conformity harder to assess and weakening the neighbourhood plan's authority.

At a recent workshop on Neighbourhood Plans, Horsham indicated a figure for Slinfold of 20 homes per annum i.e. 300 homes over a 15 year Plan period. This is significantly more than the 13 per annum we had expected to deliver and will require the allocation of one or more additional sites in the parish. Past experience tells us this will be controversial and unsettling.

This document outlines four potential options for the SNP2, analysing their implications, benefits, and drawbacks to help identify the most viable path forward.

Option 1: Do Nothing

Description: This option involves maintaining the status quo without undertaking any amendments or development efforts within the Neighbourhood Plan. Existing policies and guidelines would remain unchanged.

Advantages:

- No immediate costs associated with updating or drafting a new plan.
- Can still update Design Statement to maintain current village character.

Disadvantages:

- Fails to address housing demands or population growth, potentially exacerbating affordability and availability issues.
- Limited control over planning decisions as external authorities may intervene to enforce compliance with broader policies.
- As our original Plan is now over 5 years old, HDC have discretion to reduce the CIL receipt from 25% to 15%.
- Limits the opportunity to adapt to changing community needs and environmental priorities.

Option 2: Light Touch

Description: A minimal revision of the Neighbourhood Plan, introducing minor updates without significant changes to the existing framework.

Advantages:

- Low-cost option requiring limited investment in time and resources.
- Preserves the essence of the current plan while addressing minor discrepancies.
- Minimises disruption to community dynamics.

Disadvantages:

- Will not be accepted by HDC as a valid 'update' as it improves only superficial aspects of the plan and will not adequately address housing shortages or other pressing issues.
- Fails to satisfy long-term sustainability or development goals.
- Leaves critical infrastructure and housing gaps unresolved.

Option 3: A Plan with Modest Housing Numbers

Description: This approach involves drafting a revised plan that includes modest housing numbers, potentially meeting some but not all local housing demands. The appeal site at Lower Broadbridge Farm and a revised (15 homes) East of Hayes Lane site along with windfall deliver circa 213 homes.

Advantages:

- Balances development needs with preserving village character.

- Provides a proactive step toward addressing housing concerns without overwhelming the community.
- Enhances local control over planning while aligning with broader policies.

Disadvantages:

- HDC unlikely to accept delivery figure of 213 homes substantially below their anticipated 300 homes.
- May not hold any water at planning committee as HDC may disregard it.
- May still fall short of meeting housing targets, prolonging affordability issues.
- Parish resource will be required to negotiate reduced figure with HDC.
- Will incur significant costs which will not be able to be recouped due to lack of external funding from Government and HDC.
- Likely to require Examination and Referendum.
- Delivers smaller CIL receipt for larger infrastructure projects.

Option 4: A New Plan with Full Housing Numbers

Description:

Advantages:

- Allows Parish to locate housing where it wants sites to be developed.
- Fully addresses housing demands, ensuring affordability and sustainability.
- Aligns with external authorities' expectations, avoiding intervention or enforcement measures.
- Creates a forward-looking framework that accommodates future growth and innovation.

Disadvantages:

- One or more new sites will need to be allocated as the target figure will be circa 286 homes and exceeds identified site capacity. This will require a 'call for sites' alerting all speculative developers.
- Higher costs and resource demands for drafting and implementing the new plan. The previous Plan cost circa £40k. Anticipate £50-100k with no external funding.
- Likely to require Examination and Referendum.
- Could face resistance from community members concerned about large-scale changes.
- Requires careful planning to mitigate potential environmental and infrastructure challenges.

Costs

Updating a neighbourhood plan in the UK can vary widely in cost depending on the scale of changes, the complexity of the area, and the level of professional support needed.

Here's a breakdown:

Typical Cost Range

- Minor updates (non-material changes): Often handled internally with minimal cost, but not eligible for government grant funding.
- Substantive updates (requiring examination but no referendum): Local planning authorities can claim £10,000 in government support once the revised plan comes into force.
- Major updates (requiring both examination and referendum): Eligible for £20,000 in funding support.

Estimated Total Costs

- Government estimates suggest full neighbourhood plans (including updates) can cost between £20,000 and £86,000, depending on scope and complexity.
- Additional costs may include:
 - Consultation & engagement: £1,500–£5,000
 - Strategic Environmental Assessment: £10,000–£30,000
 - Masterplanning documents: Up to £50,000/year for consultants

Conclusion

Each of the four options presents distinct advantages and challenges for Slinfold's Neighbourhood Plan. While "Do Nothing" reduces immediate effort, it carries significant risks of stagnation and external intervention. "Light Touch" offers minimal adjustments but fails to address deeper issues. A plan with modest housing numbers strikes a balance but may not fully resolve housing needs and consequently may fail. Lastly, a new plan with full housing numbers provides the most comprehensive solution but requires significant investment and negotiation.

The choice ultimately depends on the community's priorities, available resources, and willingness to embrace change. It is critical to engage stakeholders, conduct thorough impact assessments, and seek professional advice to ensure the selected option aligns with Slinfold's long-term vision and sustainability goals.

Next Steps

SPC to review paper at July 2025 meeting and consider making recommendation to SNPWG of preferred route forward.